

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4997

INFO USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 1696

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SN, CH

SUBJ: TRAVEL OF PRIME MINISTER LEE

REFS: A. SINGAPORE 1696; B. STATE 080525

1. I BELIEVE THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE'S GENERAL MOTIVATION IN GOING TO CHINA IS IN PART TO BALANCE OFF HIS OVERTURES TO THE U.S. AND USSR, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, TO SATISFY HIS INSATIABLE CURIOSITY ABOUT MAJOR WORLD TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS. HE LIKES TO BE WHERE THE ACTION IS (AND CHINA CERTAINLY IS SUCH A PLACE ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS) AND TO MAKE HIS OWN VALUE JUDGMENTS RATHER THAN RELYING ON THOSE OF HIS SUBORDINATES. HE IS ALSO VERY CONSCIOUS OF HIS OWN IMAGE AS A PERSON WHO CAN APPROACH MAJOR WORLD FIGURES DIRECTLY AT THEIR OWN LEVELS, AND HE HAS YET TO MEET THE TOP CHINESE LEADERS. LEE ENJOYS BEING A WELL-KNOWN PERSONALITY ON THE WORLD SCENE DESPITE SINGAPORE'S SMALL SIZE, AND HIGH-PROFILE ACTIVITIES HELP HIM IN ADDITION WITH HIS SINGAPORE CONSTITUENCY. IN THIS LATTER RESPECT, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SINGAPORE MAY TAKE PLACE IN 1976.

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2. MORE SPECIFICALLY, HOWEVER, LEE WILL WANT TO FIND OUT WHETHER SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS HE HAS MADE ABOUT CHINA'S POLICY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA REMAIN VALID IN THE WAKE OF THE CURRENT PRC LEADERSHIP CHANGES. HE HAS ASSUMED THAT THE PRC WILL REMAIN INVETERATELY ANTI-SOVIET, AND HENCE AMENABLE TO A CONTINUED U.S. PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, INCLUDING SINGAPORE, AND IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. SINGAPORE HAS MADE IT PLAIN LATELY THAT IT FAVORS THIS U.S. PRESENCE, AND IS INTENSELY SUSPICIOUS OF SOVIET MOTIVES. LEE HAS FURTHER ASSUMED THAT THE CHINESE WILL NOT INTERPOSE STRENUOUS OBJECTIONS TO SINGAPORE'S USE OF TAIWAN FACILITIES TO IMPROVE ITS DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES. NOW, WITH CHOU EN-LAI GONE AND TENG HSIAO-PING SEEMINGLY FINISHED AS A POLITICAL FORCE, LEE WANTS TO SEE FOR HIMSELF WHETHER THESE ASSUMPTIONS STILL HOLD. OF COURSE, HE WANTS IN ADDITION TO GET SOME FEEL FOR THE NEW CHINESE LEADERSHIP AND SOME SENSE OF THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF CHINESE POLICY, BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL.

3. I SUSPECT THAT HIGH ON LEE'S AGENDA WILL BE SOUNDING OUT THE CHINESE ON THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD VIET-NAM, ESPECIALLY IF VIET-NAM SHOULD STEP UP PRESSURES AGAINST NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH ME, HE HAS RECENTLY DISPLAYED PARTICULAR SENSITIVITY REGARDING HANOI DESIGNS ON THAILAND, AND WHILE LEE AS A REALIST PROBABLY DOES NOT EXPECT THE PRC TO EXERT ANY INFLUENCE ON HANOI TO "LAY OFF", HE WILL NEVERTHELESS BE INTERESTED IN GETTING A BETTER INSIGHT INTO CHINESE THOUGHTS IN THIS SITUATION, NOT ONLY AS IT AFFECTS THAILAND, BUT AS REGARDS THE ASEAN COUNTRIES IN GENERAL. FOR ONE, LEE WILL BE INTERESTED IN CHINESE VIEWS ON WHAT ROLE THE U.S. MIGHT PLAY IN THAILAND.

4. AS INDICATED ABOVE, ANOTHER AGENDA ITEM FOR LEE WOULD PROBABLY BE SINGAPORE'S EXPANDED USE OF TRAINING FACILITIES ON TAIWAN FOR SINGAPORE'S ARMED FORCES. LEE IS ASTUTE ENOUGH NOT TO SEEK PRC PERMISSION, BUT HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY EXPLAIN HIS POLICY AS BEING UNDERTAKEN PURELY FOR THE DEFENSE OF SINGAPORE AND NOT DIRECTED IN ANY WAY AGAINST CHINA (WITH THE IMPLICATION THAT HE DOES NOT REGARD THE ULTIMATE THREAT TO SINGAPORE AS COMING FROM THE PRC). HE WILL HOPE THAT THE CHINESE WILL "UNDERSTAND", OR AT LEAST NOT EXPRESS CRITICISM.

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5. LEE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY WISH TO RAISE THE QUESTION OF INCREASED PRC-SINGAPORE TRADE. AT PRESENT CHINA ENJOYS A LARGE FAVORABLE BALANCE OF TRADE WITH SINGAPORE, AND LEE (NOT TO MENTION SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC PLANNERS AS A GROUP) WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE IMBALANCE REDUCED. FOR EXAMPLE, SINGAPORE WOULD LIKE TO EXPORT LOCALLY MANUFACTURED LIGHT DIESEL ENGINES TO THE PRC AND HAS MADE SOME TENTATIVE OVERTURES TO THE PRC ON THIS SCORE

VIA THE LOCAL BRANCH OF THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY. FINANCE MINISTER HON SUI SEN'S PRESENCE ON LEE'S DELEGATION IS AN INDICATION OF THE STRONG ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE VISIT. LEE WILL PROBABLY BE INTERESTED AS WELL IN THE STATE OF CHINA'S ECONOMY AND ITS FOREIGN TRADE OUTLOOK, INVOLVING AMONG OTHER THINGS SUCH COMMODITIES AS PETROLEUM.

6. ALTHOUGH LEE IS QUITE CAPABLE OF CHANGING DIRECTIONS QUICKLY AND WITH LITTLE FOREWARNING, ONE MATTER WHICH I DOUBT WILL BE RAISED BY HIM WILL BE AN EARLY EXCHANGE OF SINGAPORE-PRC DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. WE HAVE RECEIVED NO INDICATION HERE THAT SINGAPORE'S POLICY OF BEING THE LAST ASEAN COUNTRY TO ESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH PEKING HAS CHANGED. SINGAPORE STILL NEEDS MORE TIME TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL IDENTITY PRIOR TO INTRODUCTION OF THE COMPLICATING FACTOR OF A PRC EMBASSY IN SINGAPORE. A CONTINUATION OF LEE'S LINE THAT IT MUST AWAIT ACTION BY INDONESIA TO RE-ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BEFORE SINGAPORE MOVES WOULD BE HIS MOST LIKELY POSITION ON THIS MATTER.

7. FROM SINGAPORE'S VANTAGE POINT WE HAVE NO WAY OF JUDGING HOW MUCH SATISFACTION LEE IS LIKELY TO GET FROM THE CHINESE ON ANY OF THE ABOVE POINTS. HOWEVER, I WOULD ANTICIPATE AT LEAST SOME INCREASE IN SINGAPORE'S EXPORTS TO THE PRC AS A RESULT OF THE VISIT, AND PROBABLY NO CHANGE IN THE PRC'S PAST POLICY OF ACCEPTING A RELATIONSHIP WITH SINGAPORE PRETTY MUCH ON LEE'S TERMS. THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE LITTLE ADVANTAGE TO THE CHINESE TO TIGHTEN THE SCREWS ON HIM AT A TIME WHEN THEY HAVE OTHER MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS, SUCH AS BALANCING OFF SOVIET INFLUENCE IN AREAS OF STRATEGIC INTEREST TO CHINA, AND STRAIGHTENING OUT THEIR INTERNAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS. AS FOR LEE, IF ALL GOES WELL HE WILL HAVE ACCOMPLISHED ONE MAIN PURPOSE WHICH RUNS THROUGH SINGAPORE CONTACTS WITH CHINA: DEMONSTRATING TO

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THE SINGAPORE PEOPLE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA, INCLUDING EXPANDED TRADE, WITHOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

HOLDRIDGE

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